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Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (A/50/3, A/50/38, A/50/110, A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/257/Rev.1-E/1995/61/Rev.1, A/50/346, A/50/369, A/50/378, A/50/398, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/538 and A/50/691)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1)

1. Mrs. MONGELLA (Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women) said that she would make her introductory statement in due course when all the documentation on the two agenda items was available.

2. Mrs. DUEÑAS-LOZA (Acting Director, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)) said that the Institute's report (A/50/538) provided information on its programme framework and activities, which had been defined by the INSTRAW Board of Trustees as priority programmes for the biennium and had been carried out despite the drastic institutional and financial restrictions imposed. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in September in Beijing, had been the most significant international event for women in the past decade. The Platform for Action adopted there established a concrete plan for the advancement of women, expressing the firm commitment to finding lasting solutions to the major problems affecting women and laying the groundwork for a society based on equity, equality and peace.

3. The objectives of the social, economic and technical strategies addressing the conditions of women in poor rural and marginal urban areas were to provide an immediate remedy for their survival needs, help them find economic options that improve their conditions, and propose strategies to achieve sustainable food security, safe energy sources, clean water, sanitation, and secure income to alleviate extreme poverty.

4. The Institute's plan for the biennium 1996-1997 would be guided by the Beijing Platform for Action, would be based on regional priorities and would build upon the recommendations put forward by the recent major United Nations conferences. It would also incorporate the basic goals of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to be held in 1996. The biennial work programme would focus on four thematic areas: economic and political empowerment for women; women, environment and sustainable development; women, media and the new communication and information technologies; and gender statistics and indicators. The economic and political empowerment research programme was oriented towards enabling women to increase their capacity to overcome the marginal condition in which they lived. Recognizing the importance of women's access to credit and other financial resources as a means of eradicating poverty, INSTRAW would promote an international campaign to improve women's access to credit worldwide. As part of its preparations for Habitat II, the Institute would organize an expert group meeting in early 1996 on women's habitat in zones of conflict.

5. The emergence of sustainability as a new development criterion and the new insights into the linkages between population growth, environment and development required substantial institutional change and technological innovation. Many of the challenges confronting society with respect to sustainable development, environment and security were closely linked to natural resources management. Those challenges required a major shift away from the business-as-usual approach, which had fundamental limitations. Women were largely absent from natural resources management and decision-making structures and were further marginalized owing to their lack of access to information, technology and economic resources. They must participate in the planning and implementation of environmental policies and programmes that affected them. Research was needed to promote women's access to appropriate technologies and economic resources.

6. INSTRAW would conduct research on ways to use emerging communication and information technologies as tools for the advancement of women and also study the extent to which women's organizations were using new technologies to gain access to information and as a tool for networking. On the basis of that research, a manual on the use of those technologies for research, training, networking and advocacy would be developed for women's organizations.

7. The Institute's programme on gender statistics and indicators was aimed at improving existing and developing new statistical concepts and methodologies, and applying them. The Institute would continue to improve the concepts and methods used to quantify the remunerated and unremunerated work of women and men. Its research would also be targeted to improving methods of data collection for measuring poverty among women and men and to developing statistical methods to improve data on women's human rights. The Institute would continue to address the specific situation of elderly women and would participate in 1996 in preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (1999). The Institute would convene an international conference for researchers and policy makers by the end of 1997. Research was needed to address the specific situations of young girls, the elderly, migrant women, refugees, internally displaced women and those in situations of armed conflict.

8. She stressed that local, regional and international networking would be only as effective as the level of commitment by each component to improving the status of women.

9. Ms. KING (Deputy to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management), speaking on the question of the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, said that the Secretary-General's report on that subject (A/50/691) should be considered in conjunction with the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/50/540), which gave additional details about women in the United Nations. Table 1 of the former report showed that, during the period under review, the percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had increased modestly from 32.6 per cent to 34 per cent. The percentage of women at the D-1 level through the Under-Secretary-General level had increased from 15 per cent to 17 per cent, still well below the target of 25 per cent set for 1995. The percentage of women in posts with special language requirements, as indicated in table 2, had remained virtually the same. For the first time, a higher proportion of women than men

had been promoted, 51.2 per cent, showing more consistent commitment on the part of managers and the appointment and promotion bodies concerned. Table 4 indicated the percentage of women appointed by level. The overall percentage was 44.4.

10. Despite those changes, obstacles to the improvement of the status of women existed at all levels, including those at the General Service levels, who constituted 57.8 per cent of that category. Obstacles existed in terms of career development, mobility and conditions of service that would permit more easily the notion of dual careers for women. In the area of harassment, including sexual harassment, data would be collected to assess the extent and nature of the problem and to revise guidelines and sanctions for more effectively dealing with incidents.

11. One of the most important developments within the United Nations common system was the statement of commitment by the heads of all the United Nations agencies and organizations at the session of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in February 1995. The statement addressed measures to facilitate the recruitment of women, encourage their mobility, promote a supportive work environment and foster the necessary attitudinal changes. ACC also underscored management commitment to the goals of gender balance and stressed that particular attention must be paid to increasing the number of women in senior managerial positions. Accordingly, women from any of the common system organizations could apply to any of the others. Also important was the commitment to continue work on spouse employment and facilitating mobility, and more modern mechanisms for enhancing productivity, while taking into account the realities of women's and men's responsibilities at work and at home.

12. The culmination of the year had taken place at the Beijing Conference on Women, which had reaffirmed the targets of 50 per cent women in posts subject to geographical distribution and 50 per cent women in senior managerial levels, both by the year 2000. Those two targets had been endorsed by the General Assembly in the context of its call, in resolution 49/167, for the implementation of the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000).

13. The Beijing Platform for Action, the strategic plan and the consolidated measures to improve the status of women (A/50/691, para. 30) should provide for the first time an integrated basis for assessing progress in achieving the overall targets for women in the Secretariat. Much needed to be done to meet those daunting challenges, particularly the target of 50 per cent women overall and in the highest management levels by the year 2000.

14. Mrs. SADIK (Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), speaking on item 165, said that the Beijing Platform for Action, in calling on Governments to integrate a gender perspective into all policies and programmes and to adopt concrete measures to empower women and promote gender equality, strengthened crucial agreements reached at previous forums. It had, however, gone further in affirming that women's human rights included the right to control matters related to their sexuality, thus making a break with value systems that had used women's reproductive role to oppress and degrade them. The new vision protected women's right to reproductive health and called for

shared responsibility between men and women in matters relating to reproductive behaviour. It further recognized the importance of equal access to land credit and rewarding employment, of women's participation in decision-making and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

15. At the Secretary-General's request, an Inter-Agency Task Force had been set up to implement the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) of which she had been Secretary-General. Under that initiative, a working group on women's empowerment, with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) as the lead agency, had met in May 1995 with a view to following up the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. It had developed proposals for inter-agency cooperation at the country level to eliminate gender disparity and promote women's leadership roles and had issued guidelines on women's empowerment for use by United Nations resident coordinators to facilitate gender-sensitive development policies.

16. UNFPA was committed to advocating all the objectives set out in the Platform for Action and would provide financial and programme support in the areas of health, equality for girls, women's legal rights, elimination of traditional practices harmful to women and prevention of violence against women. A commitment to gender equality underlay all its programmes and actions, as did a commitment to expanding its partnerships with women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations. It was also committed to promoting gender equality within the Fund and the United Nations system as a whole; UNFPA already had a high proportion of women among its professional staff and in senior-level positions.

17. UNFPA was working to build up the capacity of women's non-governmental organizations through skill and leadership training, and it would continue to work with UNIFEM to strengthen non-governmental organizations with regard to human rights. Women and women's organizations were mobilized as never before; they would work with international organizations and with decision makers in their own countries and ensure that men were equal partners in the process.

18. The Beijing Conference and the conferences leading up to it had been very successful and had been vital to the process of forging consensus on a strategic agenda. The time had come for a vigorous follow-up.

19. Ms. HEYZER (Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that the Beijing Platform for Action had further expanded the agenda for women's empowerment and women's rights. UNIFEM provided what support it could to ensure that grass-roots women had the skills and opportunities to be active players in international policy setting. The challenge before it was to put into practice women's vision of a transformed world that would ensure equality, peace and well-being for all.

20. In accordance with the mandate given to it by the General Assembly, the Fund's resources were used as a catalyst to ensure the involvement of women in mainstream development and to support innovative activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities, such as the reduction of poverty, food security, environment, actions to prevent violence against women and women's political participation.

21. In the period following the Beijing Conference on Women, UNIFEM would focus its operational work on economic empowerment, for which women must have control over economic resources and assets, and political empowerment, for which women must have control over their lives and be decision makers.

22. UNIFEM had had 20 years of experience in over 65 developing countries in identifying emerging gender issues developing innovative approaches and strategies for addressing critical issues affecting women, applying a gender perspective to development interventions, working with women's organizations, supporting innovative operational programmes benefiting women and acting as a catalyst within the United Nations system to bring about women's empowerment.

23. The work of UNIFEM had ranged from grass-roots projects that improved working conditions for women to public education campaigns and the design of new census and marketing systems. Its successes included innovative projects benefiting women, such as pioneering the use of loan funds to make credit available to women; incorporating women into mainstream development; and building partnerships and networks among women, Governments and the international community in order to strengthen the position of women in science and technology, to institutionalize gender-sensitive financial services for women and to combat domestic and sexual violence. Its experiences at various United Nations conferences had demonstrated the importance of creating new political spaces where consensus could be forged.

24. UNIFEM had been discussing with the United Nations Development Programme the strengthening of technical support to United Nations resident coordinators in order to assist in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the national level, and would continue to work closely with UNFPA on women's empowerment. The Beijing Conference had endorsed the mission of UNIFEM and had specifically stated that it should be given adequate resources for carrying out its functions; she drew attention to the fact that the baseline funding that supported women's empowerment was low and that UNIFEM needed additional resources.

25. Ms. ENGELBRECHT (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, and supported by Mr. AGGREY (Ghana), Mrs. BRENNEN-HAYLOCK (Bahamas), on behalf of a number of Caribbean countries, Mrs. TAVARES DE ÁLVAREZ (Dominican Republic), Mr. FERNÁNDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba), Mrs. MSUYA (United Republic of Tanzania), Mrs. SUBIRATS (Spain), on behalf of the European Union, Mrs. LEGWAILA (Botswana), Mr. COLOMA (Chile), Mrs. CHIGAGA (Zambia), Ms. NZENZA (Zimbabwe), Mrs. MESDOUA (Algeria), Ms. LIMJUCO (Philippines) and Mr. OTUYELU (Nigeria), expressed disappointment at the lack of the relevant documents for agenda items 107 and 165 which precluded the possibility of any meaningful debate during the current meeting. They proposed that the discussion should be suspended until steps had been taken to remedy that situation.

The meeting rose at noon.